DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 361 836 EA 025 180

AUTHOR Cunningham, Craig A.
TITLE Unique Potential: A Metaphor for John Dewey's Moral Self.
PUB DATE Apr 93
NOTE 41p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Atlanta, GA, April 12-16, 1993).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Philosophy; Elementary Secondary Education; *Epistemology; *Ethical Instruction; Ethics; *Heuristics; Models; *Self Congruence
IDENTIFIERS *Dewey (John)

ABSTRACT

This paper suggests that the current confusion regarding character formation is related to a postmodern dilemma about the nature of the individual child. By looking at John Dewey's concept of "potentials," and by applying this concept to his ideas about the self and experience, this paper develops a naturalistic version of the idea of "unique potential" (a "higher self") as a model to support a program in moral or character education. This model must provide the coherent view needed for an adequate conceptualization of character and also must meet the modern scientific demand for concepts grounded in the realm of experience. Specifically, this paper attempts to develop a model of the self using Dewey's epistemology. It is suggested that the concept of "unique potential" is an effective metaphor for the underlying unity of the self which could withstand the differentiations of empirical scrutiny. The discussion attempts to describe the fit between the eudaimonic concept of "daimon," or unique potential excellence, and Dewey's empirical, naturalistic epistemology. The concept is shown to be a useful heuristic device for understanding the self in its unified, organic, holistic aspects as well as in its specific, operational, microscopic activities. (LMI)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 361 836

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

C. Cunningham

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Unique Potential

A Metaphor for John Dewey's Moral Self

A Paper Presented at the
American Educational Research Association
(John Dewey SIG)
Annual Meeting in Atlanta
April 12-16, 1992

by Craig A. Cunningham

The Hyde Foundation
and
The University of Chicago

EA 025 180

Correspondence:

The Hyde Foundation
616 High Street
Bath ME 04530
(207) 443-5584

"There is a profound confusion in America today about the school's role in shaping character." So writes Gerald Grant in his ethnographic study of a typical contemporary high school (1988, 1). It is not hard to find evidence of this confusion; it is almost a commonplace that American youths are less motivated and disciplined they were in the past. It is easy to share Jackson's "hunch that we know less today than we once did about how to teach" (1987, 384). One aspect of knowing "how to teach" is our model of the human self, our "moral ontology" (Taylor 1989). This paper suggests that the "profound confusion" regarding character formation is related to a post-modern dilemma about the nature of the individual child.

Betty Sichel writes in her *Moral Education: Character, Community, and Ideals* that "a conceptualization of character needs some view of a coherent self that retains its selfhood through a wide variety of change." Sichel is not satisfied with the "concept of a moral self or moral personhood" (1988, 82) offered by extant theories of moral education. Without a "view of a coherent self that retains its selfhood through a wide variety of change," Sichel and others claim, moral character is defined in terms of conventional societal norms or virtues, resulting in a moral education that is static and indoctrinative (e.g., Pritchard 1988).

One common manner of conceiving the self is that each person possesses a "higher self" or "unique potential" which is the educator's responsibility to "draw out." Educators of fifty or more years ago seemed much more comfortable speaking this transcendental language--using words like "destiny," "potential," "higher self," "faith" and "ideals"--than we do today. For example, Henry Neumann wrote in 1930:

> Over and beyond such mixed creatures as our daily behaviors show us to be, are the ideal selves. For all the fact that some schools of psychology choose to make their studies without reference to 'souls,' this higher nature in man is real enough for those with eyes to see it. . . . The main inspiration in the business of making lives (a slow and often very baffling business) is the keenly felt sense of an ideal self, a self quite reluctant about revealing itself to number hunting (624-626).

Similarly, Edward Sisson wrote in 1927:

> [F]aith in human nature operates in the most definite manner in the educative relation. The teacher who has it constantly perceives and judges every child in the best possible light; he interprets the child's conduct as favorably as intelligence permits; and above all, he casts the child's horoscope, reckons his course, forecasts his development on the highest possible level. This is the deepest and most indispensable technique of character education (927; see also Lawson 1915 and Glenn 1932.)

This concept, in various permutations and disguises, has had a long history in philosophies of ethics and of education (for example, Aristotle 1962; Leibniz 1972; F. H. Bradley 1951). More recently, the concept of unique potential has been used successfully as a working metaphor for the self in the alternative character education program at the Hyde School, in Bath, Maine (see Bradley 1989), and the concept continues to surface periodically in the realm of popular psychology (see, for example, Maslow 1962, Waitley 1978). A strong philosophical argument in support of this notion of unique potential has been laid out in David Norton's *Personal Destinies* (1976).

During the past fifty years or so, however, professional philosophers have relentlessly pursued the goal of "demythologizing" (Scheffler 1985) or "demystifying" our everyday constructs. The "hunch" I would add to Jackson's is that all this stripping of "thick" (Geertz 1983) concepts may be doing more harm than good: "By viewing the primary purpose of reason as the demystification of all cultural beliefs and traditions, the Western mode of

consciousness introduces a seemingly progressive impulse that threatens the foundations of culture and ultimately erodes the basis of belief itself" (Bowers 1985, 467). As Charles Taylor has written, "A little examination should show that it is not always true that the road to surer knowledge lies through disengagement and procedural reason" (1989, 163).

How we think about the self in moral (and by that I mean general) education is one of those conceptual arenas caught in a continuing tension between beliefs rooted in tradition, culture, and myth and the drive to produce "analytically sound and scientifically informed" (Scheffler 1985, 2) reconstructions of these beliefs. John Dewey was one professional philosopher who spent a great deal of energy trying to make the practice of education more scientific; yet he also carried with William James a strong respect for matters of personal belief and faith in ideals. Dewey often argued that conventional conceptions of education were limited, and urged practitioners to abandon convention and adopt the method of intelligence as the method of choice for solving problems. Dewey was especially hard on conceptions that were transcendental or supernatural, implying a dualistic universe in which an ideal or spiritual realm was forever divorced from the material world.

Despite this predilection toward the language of modern science, Dewey was not at all loathe to use the favorite words of the Idealists in his own version of pragmatism, especially in his later work. Even a word such as "God" survives the "winnowing fan" of Dewey's empiricism once it has been subject to a properly naturalistic reconstruction (see *A Common Faith*, 1934b). Thus it is not surprising that Dewey continued to rely on notions such as "capacity," "possibility," and "vision." Dewey's conceptions of individuality and the human

self are based in part on his assertion that "potentials" are a legitimate aspect of nature. Potentials--revealed through the application of intelligence to experience--provide us with concrete ends-in-view which infuse life with meaning and value.

By looking closely at Dewey's concept of "potentials," and by applying this concept to his ideas about the self and about experience, this paper develops an naturalistic version of the idea of "unique potential" as a model for the self which provides the foundation for the "coherent view" which Sichel claims is needed to support an adequate conceptualization of character and yet also meets the modern scientific demand for concepts grounded in the realm of experience.

The attempt to develop this model of the self using Dewey's epistemology is not entirely arbitrary. Dewey himself appreciated the need for a better model. He noted that we tend to take the self for granted. He wrote in *Experience and Nature*: "The constancy and pervasiveness of the operative presence of the self as a determining factor in all situations is the chief reason why we give so little heed to it; it is more intimate and omnipresent in experience than the air we breathe" (Dewey 1929, 246). Because of this omnipresence of the self, Dewey writes that it is essential that science and philosophy come to terms with it.

> [T]ill we understand operations of the self as *the tool of tools*, the means to all use of means, specifying its differential activities in their distinctive consequences in varying qualities of what is experienced, science is incomplete and the use made of it is at the mercy of an unknown factor, so that the ultimate and important consequence is in so far a matter of accident (ibid, 247; emphasis added).

It is, then, part of Dewey's own philosophical program to define the self better.

I offer four criteria for evaluating whether a model of the self is adequate to the task of warranting a philosophy of moral education. First, a model of the self must insist upon *limits* to the self--boundaries between what *is* and *is not* the self--and provide some way of knowing what these limits are. Second, because each individual can be distinguished from any other, any model of the self must deal with how and why selves are qualitatively unique (that have "strict numerical identity," in philosophical lingo; see Hollis 1977). Third, the model must deal with the process of development, providing a mechanism or mechanisms whereby the self is altered through time while retaining "its selfhood through a wide variety of change." Fourth, the model must provide some synthesis between its notions of individual personality and its understanding of social roles.

These criteria should be kept in mind as I lay out my argument.

Eudaimonic Philosophy

The concept of "unique potential" is a cornerstone of eudaimonic ethical philosophy, which holds that "each person is obliged to know and live in truth to his 'daimon,' thereby progressively actualizing an excellence that is his innately and potentially" (Norton 1976, ix). This idea fit well within the ancient Greek dualistic metaphysics of actuality and potentiality, in which "[t]he soul was the perfect realization of the material body and its inherent potentialities." This "ruled out any simple reductionism, as proposed by the atomists of Greek times, or the behaviorists today, since potencies were as much to be reckoned with as actualities" (Hearnshaw-Smith 1987, 24).

For a eudaimonist, the *daimon* refers to an ideal of perfection, "affording to the actual person his supreme aim and establishing the principle by which

the actual person can grow in identity, worth, and being" (Norton 1976, 14). The daimon makes an appearance in Plato's *Symposium* when Socrates excuses himself from an argument at hand to go off and confer with an inner voice to discover the truth that is his own, and to resolve conflicts that are rooted in neither facts nor rationality, but in the self (line 170ff). Eudaimonists believe that these inner truths are innate and predetermined. "The aim we take for the end is not determined by the choice of the individual himself, but by a natural gift of vision, as it were, which enables him to make correct judgments and to choose what is truly good" (Aristotle 1962, 67). For a eudaimonist, the good is to live one's life in harmony with the dictates of this unique *daimon*, this individual "essence" that expresses itself as an "inner voice," or "conscience." The sense of rightness of a particular choice, of its fitness for the unique individual, is termed "eudaimonia," while its opposite, the sense of unfitness, is termed "dysdaimonia." With the latter, Aristotle writes, individuals are at variance with themselves:

> [T]heir relations with themselves are not friendly. Therefore, such people do not share their joys and sorrows with themselves, for their soul is divided against itself, and while one part, because of its wickedness, feels sorrow when it abstains from certain things, another part feels pleasure: one part pulls in one direction and the other in another as if to tear the individual to pieces (ibid, 254).

For eudaimonists, individuals have a duty--supported by these two antithetical feelings in a sort of internal guidance system--to listen to their "gift of vision" and to develop a relationship with their own *daimon*, to come to know the *daimon's* truth, and to live in accordance with this truth.

The *daimon*, as each person's "ideal of perfection," coincides with the more modern idea of "unique potential." As a potential, the *daimon* is never

completely actualized, but serves as a guide to each individual's decisions, a goal to be striven for, an "end-in-view," to use Dewey's phrase. For Aristotle, this leads to the ethical mandate of the Golden Mean, whereas for Norton, the potential self is connected to the actual person by a "path of implications, whose progressive explication constitutes . . . the person's 'destiny'" (1976, 16); excellence, or arete, is expressed when a person's choices coincide with his or her destiny. Thus a model of the self, based on the unique potential excellences of each particular person, leads for Norton to an ethics of individualism, or self-actualization, in which character and the virtues play a key role.

From a naturalistic perspective, eudaimonic philosophy is severely undercut by the insistence that a person's *daimon* is eternal and unchanging, much like a Platonic "form" or essence which is inadequately expressed in the actuality that is the person. This type of idealistic metaphysics, which makes unfalsifiable assertions about the nature of an unempirical "higher reality," is severely and justifiably criticized by Dewey in *Experience and Nature* and elsewhere.

David Norton, our contemporary eudaimonist, makes no pretensions about being an empiricist. Rather, when he discusses his own method of doing philosophy, he argues that

> the best evidence remains indirect, and *the sought-for historical 'facts' are of the nature of beliefs.* In these conditions the best results remain interpretive, and admit alternative interpretations. The principle of our own interpretation is that of *coherence*. . .. Finality of interpretation is not required, because our objective is . . . the presentation of a eudaimonism *serviceable* for today" (ibid, 40-41; emphasis added).

Using these tests of "beliefs," "coherence," and "serviceability," Norton

constructs a self-referent pop-psychology which appeals to the heart but can never be entirely explicated by the rational, experience-based, critical mind. Therefore he leaves us with no basis for buying into his philosophy except the resonance of his assertions with our own inner beliefs; failing this resonance, there is no foundation for agreeing or disagreeing with his philosophical conclusions.[1]

In fact, Norton states explicitly that "there can be no empirical demonstration of the universality of innate potential excellences" (ibid, xii).[2] The question immediately arises of whether we can "save" the concept of "daimon," or unique potential, without resorting to metaphysics or mere

---

[1]Norton's reliance on such pragmatic criteria for his model of the self is supported by the argument of Charles Taylor (1989) that all anyone can really hope for in a self model is the "best account" possible under the circumstances. He writes: "What better measure of reality do we have in human affairs than those terms which on critical reflection and after correction of the errors we can detect make the best sense of our lives" (57).

[2]In conversations between Norton and myself, he has disavowed the sort of anti-empiricism with which I have labelled him here. Indeed, his recent book, *Democracy and Moral Development* (1991) is somewhat more naturalistic than the earlier *Personal Destinies* (1976). However, he continues in the later book to speak of the daimon as being "innate" (3) and writes: "...because *its outcome is within it implicitly from its inception*, there is nothing in personhood that is 'merely subjective'..." (1991, 8; emphasis added). What does this mean if not some transcendental "form" of the self which exists in some ideal realm from the moment of our birth? I reject this metaphysics and insist that the daimon or unique potential itself is created in the process of transaction between the individual and his environment.

traditional belief. Is the development of this concept possible using the rigorous method of "empirical naturalism," which "provides the . . .only way . . .by which one can freely accept the standpoint and conclusions of modern science: the way by which we can be genuinely naturalistic and yet maintain cherished values, provided they are critically clarified and reinforced" (Dewey 1929, ix-x)? Using this "winnowing fan," can we separate the transcendental chaff from the naturalistic wheat? Can we posit the empirical reality of unique potentials and preserve enough of the concept's power to use it to support a system of ethics or moral education?

If we hope to salvage the concept of "unique potential" and still retain an empirical epistemology, we must find a way to conceptualize the daimon, or unactualized but potential self, without resorting to Aristotle's conception of essence or Norton's anti-empirical innatism. It is my contention that such a salvage operation is possible by analyzing the concept of "potentials" as it is expressed in Dewey's epistemology. Rather than doing away with "potentials" as an unrealizable, idealized, metaphysical "form," Dewey brings potentials back into nature, and makes them part of experienced, naturalistic reality (Alexander 1987). If we can salvage the concept of potential within Dewey's naturalistic, empirical epistemology, then we have gone one step further toward our goal of building a philosophical psychology of the self.

Potentials in Dewey's Epistemology

Dewey's *Later Works* are replete with the word "potential" or its cousin, "possibility." He also relies consistently on the ideas of "tendency" or "direction," which are closely related to potential. This section will try to discover Dewey's understanding of these terms by exploring their occurrence

in two of his seminal texts, *Experience and Nature* (1929) and *Art As Experience* (1934a).

We start with Dewey's concept of an "event." All events, since they are "events and not rigid and lumpy substances, are ongoing and hence as such unfinished, incomplete, indeterminate. Consequently they possess a possibility of being so managed and steered that ends may become fulfillments not just termini, conclusions not just closings" (Dewey 1929, 159). This possibility of being managed and steered is what makes for the possibility of human choice and therefore of individuality and growth.

Dewey's understanding of "meaning" arises from this understanding of the indeterminateness of events. He suggests that meanings of words assigned to events are essentially assertions of "potential consequences." He writes: "when we name an event, calling it fire, we speak proleptically; we do not name an immediate event; that is impossible. We employ a term of discourse; we invoke a meaning, namely, the potential consequence of the existence" (ibid, 191). Meanings move events beyond mere indeterminateness; they suggest tendencies, or possible directions. Meanings are imputed potentialities, and are developed by the application of intelligence to experience. "The striving to make stability of meaning prevail over the instability of events is the main task of intelligent human effort." (ibid, 50). Stability of meanings results, at least in part, from the awareness that particular kinds of events have particular kinds of potentialities. Thus, cognition of potentialities is at the root of control and understanding.

In assigning meanings to events, human intelligence confers "upon things traits and potentialities which did not previously belong to them"; this

assignment "marks a change by which physical events exhibiting properties of mechanical energy. . .realize characters, meanings and relations of meanings hitherto not possessed by them" (ibid, 381-2).[3] This conferring of potentialities onto events leads to greater understanding and to greater power to make life what we want it to be. Thus, potentials are not transcendental or metaphysical, as implied in Norton (1976), but are intellectual tools. As such, they are real: not material, but nonetheless real aspects of objects and events. Dewey writes:

> When an event has meaning, its potential consequences become its integral and funded feature. When the potential consequences are important and repeated, they form the very nature and essence of a thing, its defining, identifying, and distinguishing form. . ... To perceive is to acknowledge unattained possibilities; it is to refer the present to consequences, apparition to issue, and thereby to behave in deference to the connections of events (1929, 181-2).

Perception of a potentiality, or a possible consequence of an event, is an assertion of a direction to an event, which "may be furthered or counteracted

---

[3]It is unclear whether Dewey believes that potentialities are "discovered" or "invented." Clearly, *meanings* do not exist until they are posited by some intelligence; that is, until some intelligent being attributes potentiality to an event or object. But what about the potentialities which are behind the meanings? The sun certainly had the potential to warm the earth before any intelligent creature was aware of this potential. Here we encounter one of the slippery aspects of our conception of potential, and one which is at the root of modern social science's avoidance of the term. I suggest that the metaphysical question of whether potentials exist if they are not cognized is only a problem when we continue to treat "mind" and "matter" as completely separate entities. Dewey's transactionalism would help us to overcome this dualism.

and frustrated, but which is 'intrinsic'" (ibid, 373). These directions, or tendencies, are intricately entwined in the concept of potentials. Thus, potentials can be seen as Dewey's recognition of a "natural teleology," which, he believes, is essential to avoid a dualistic conception of reality. "When men ceased to interpret facts in terms of potentiality and actuality, and resorted to that of causality, mind and matter stood over against one another in stark unlikeness." (ibid, 251) But the teleology which Dewey posits is not somehow "above" nature: "the teleology of nature is achieved and exhibited by nature in thinking, not apart from it." (ibid, 352) Thinking, then, by imputing meanings to events, asserts potential direction or tendency, a sense of which is necessary for experiences to have the consummatory quality necessary for complete experience. Tendencies, or potential directions, "contain a perception of meanings such as flexibly directs a forward movement." By understanding these potential directions, we can direct our lives towards ends-in-view. The end of an event then is "no longer a terminal point, external to the conditions that have led up to it; it is the continually developing meaning of present tendencies - the very things which as directed we call means" (ibid, 373).

For Dewey then, potentials, or potentialities, are imputed to events by thinking, and once this is done, are utilized by persons as a source of both meaning and means to attain ends-in-view. Without an awareness of potentials, we would be powerless to control the course of events, and powerless to understand experience. All experience would be primary, or immediate, and persons would have no ability, or means, to direct or control nature. The capacity of humans to become aware of potentials, their "potential awareness" as it were, is therefore the crux of pure and applied knowledge and, it seems,

the primary reason that humans are distinct from other animals. Thus, we see that awareness of potentials is crucial to understanding and control. If our aim, as philosophers of education, is to better understand the self that it might be better controlled through education, it seems that we must better understand the concept of potential as it is applied to the self. This application is the aim of the next section.

The Self as Unique Potential

Potentialities exist in humans as well as in other objects and events. Potentialities exist in the body, as the potential to sense colors, sounds, and other "qualities" (ibid, 132); they also exist in the mind as the potential to alter future experiences through planning and purpose (ibid, 352), and as the potential for artistic appreciation (ibid, 376). Thus each of us has potentials; each possesses a set of capacities for sensation, for reflection, and for action. Potentials are aspects of our selves, developed by an increasing awareness of the self's "nature and goals," derived by reflection upon "obstacles surmounted and means employed" (ibid, 59). Thus we come to the crucial relationship between the individual self and a concept of potentials:

> Individuality itself is originally a potentiality and is realized only in interaction with surrounding conditions. In this process of intercourse, native capacities, which contain an element of uniqueness, are transformed and become a self. Moreover, through resistances encountered, the nature of the self is discovered. The self is both formed and brought to consciousness through interaction with environment. . . . [T]he self is created in the creation of objects, a creation that demands active adaptation to external materials, including a modification of the self so as to utilize and thereby overcome external necessities by incorporating them in an individual vision and expression" (Dewey 1934a, 282).

This passage is loaded with implications for our model of the self based on

potentials. I will now try to unpack it.

First, Dewey writes that "individuality itself is originally a potentiality." Like Norton, Dewey believes that the individual self exists, as potentiality, before it becomes actualized. Whether this kind of existence can be distinguished from a "metaphysical" existence is another matter. For Dewey the empirical naturalist, if we say something exists, then it must be a part of our experience. Like with the naming of "fire," an event is understood through an awareness of potential consequences. If we for the moment assert that individuality is an on-going event, then to understand it we must become aware of its possible future consequences. Because every person upon birth could, in the future, affect reality, then every individual has potential consequences, and can be understood or comprehended through these potentials. Like any "object of experience," which for Dewey has as much existential reality as a material thing, potentials are real, empirical aspects of any individual. Can we experience potentials? Surely. Just as we can look at fire and know that it could burn us if we aren't careful, we can look at an infant and know that with proper nourishment, training, and love, this could someday be a happy adult; it could even be some future Einstein or Hitler (speaking metaphorically, that is: our infant could only become what he could become).

To what extent are these potentialities bounded? That is, are our potentialities in some way a predetermination of our destinies? To use our silly example, could any infant become Hitler? This brings us to the second assertion in the passage above: "In this process of intercourse, native capacities, which contain an element of uniqueness, are transformed and

become a self." So Dewey believes that there exists at least one boundary on the potentials of the self: native capacities. It has become rather unpopular to speak about these capacities or endowments; they reek of hierarchies of value--such as the discredited concept of IQ--which assert determinable limits on an individual's potentials. Yet we all know that each person is gifted with a different set of "talents" than others; that some infants are cholicky, while others are placid; that some women are "born ballerinas," while others would be more suited to play basketball or put the shot. Surely we can all agree, with Dewey, that some limits are placed on development by genetics and by pre-natal conditions. Our potentials are already somewhat defined by the time we are born. Dewey writes that these capacities have "*an element* of uniqueness," which implies that our selves also have much in common. Dewey writes: "there is a constitution common to all normal individuals. They have the same hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions; they are fed with the same foods, hurt by the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same remedies, warmed and cooled by the same variations in climate" (ibid, 245). These generic qualities also act as limits on what any individual can do or become.[4]

Awareness of these limits on potential are useful. As Dewey writes: "There is an assumption that freedom can be found only when personal activity is liberated from control by objective factors. The very existence of a

---

[4]This claim of the reality of native capacities is not to make any kind of assertion about how or whether societal resources should be allocated to individuals on the basis of these capacities. To do so would be to claim something akin to an "is-ought" fallacy.

work of art is evidence that there is no such opposition between the spontaneity of the self and objective order and law" (ibid, 279). Compare this Jean-Jacques Rousseau's words in *Emile*: "The eternal laws of nature and order do exist. For the wise man, they take the place of positive law. They are written in the depth of his heart by conscience and reason. It is to these that he ought to enslave himself in order to be free" (1979, 473). Thus we see that the limitations on our potentials which form the boundaries of individuals and of our species can be seen, rather than as limitations, as useful realizations of possible rather than impossible future directions which can connect us in concrete ways with nature, with society, and with experience. To borrow a word from sociologist Yves Simon, selves are "superdetermined" (see Kuic 1974).

Most of the wisest people throughout history have taught that awareness of our *impotence* is at least as important as is awareness of our power. This is the purpose behind the Socratic process of *elenchus*; and it is related to Jesus' claim that one must lose his life in order to save it. The inability to come to terms with the limits on our abilities, and on our responsibilities, leads both to neuroses--which come from accepting too much responsibility over events--and to character disorders--accepting too little (see Peck 1978).

Awareness of objective conditions, then, is essential for any reasonable understanding of the self. The uniqueness of native capacities combines with the generic quality of individuals to form a limited set of potentials for any person. No person can fly unassisted; none of us can hold our breath for an hour; all of us who are "normal individuals" can breathe and talk and play; but only some of us can write amazing compositions for the kings and queens of

Europe at age seven. These boundaries on our potentials are not, however, absolute, but rather serve as a sort of "probability distribution" of possible directions for the self. Dewey writes:

> A tendency, a movement, occurs within certain limits which define its direction. But tendencies of experience do not have limits that are exactly fixed or that are mathematic lines without breadth and thickness. Experience is too rich and complex to permit such limitation. The termini of tendencies are bands not lines, and the qualities that characterize them form a spectrum instead of being capable of distribution in separate pigeonholes (1934a, 224).

These bands of probable direction, of potentials, are means for attaining our personal goals. By analyzing our various choices, in light of our values and our probability bands, we can most effectively develop our lives and experiences in light of our desires.[5]

This brings us to the third statement in that well-packed passage quoted above: "through resistances encountered, the nature of the self is discovered. The self is both formed and brought to consciousness through interaction with environment." Each self contains impulsions which are manifestations of the native capacities and generic qualities of individual humans: including libido, hunger, and the drive for understanding and meaning.[6] These impulsions

---

[5]Notice that this formulation says nothing about a predetermined "path" which we are "meant" to follow. However, certain paths will be precluded by our potentials, while others, we would be foolish not to fulfill. At some point, I hope to analyze the ways in which conscience, or the antithetical feelings of eudaimonia and dysdaimonia, work as a cybernetic control system to guide this process of discernment.

[6]Dewey distinguished the word "impulsion" from the word "impulse": "An impulse is

meet resistances from and in the world, and the self attempts to use its tools of intelligence (including its awareness of its potentials) to overcome these resistances:

> In the process of converting . . . obstacles and neutral conditions into favoring agencies, the live creature becomes aware of the intent implicit in its impulsion. The self, whether it succeed or fail, does not merely restore itself to its former state. Blind surge has been changed into a purpose; instinctive tendencies are transformed into contrived undertaking. The attitudes of the self are informed with meaning (ibid, 59).

Thus the self itself becomes an object of understanding, and of meaning. We have then a dialectical relationship between the impulsions of the self and environment, which, upon being directed by intelligence, leads to greater understanding of both self and environment, and as part and parcel of this self-understanding comes a greater awareness of possibilities and potentialities. Recall at this point Dewey's statement that the self is the "tool of tools" (1929, 247). As such, awareness of the "meaning" or possible consequences of the self is a prerequisite for effective use of other tools for attaining our ends-in-view. (This is also one way of looking at the notion of character, as the quality of having a realistic and experienced-based sense of one's own potentialities and limitations. The Greek notion of *pistis* captures

---

specialized and particular; it is, even when instinctive, simply a part of the mechanism involved in a more complete adaptation with the environment. 'Impulsion' designates a movement outward and forward of the whole organism to which special impulses are auxiliary" (Dewey 1934a, 58)

this quality very well (see Norton and Norton 1972).

Finally, "[T]he self is created in the creation of objects, a creation that demands active adaptation to external materials, including a modification of the self so as to utilize and thereby overcome external necessities by incorporating them in an individual vision and expression." This sentence recapitulates what has just been said about the dialectical relationship between the self and the environment and also re-emphasizes Dewey's *transactional* account of the self: it emerges in the process of time; it is "not something given once for all at the beginning which then proceeds to unroll as a ball of yarn may be unwound" (1940, 103). Rather, by coming to terms with "external materials" which is accomplished by the creation of "objects," the self is developed into, and develops itself into, an "individual." Thus we see that the imputation of potentials onto the self is not different in kind from the development of meanings about other events and objects of experience. Through the application of intelligence, we come to realize that we, and other humans, possess the potential of affecting the future; as we interact with the environment by overcoming resistances in the furthering of our impulsions, we increasingly come to understand the limitations as well as the possibilities in our selves: we come to better understand our own unique set of potentials. These potentials become part of our awareness of the object/event which we call the self: these potentials come to "mark the thing in itself, and form its nature, [and] the event thus marked becomes an object of contemplation." Furthermore, these potentials are not simply added on to the self," but are part of it: "as meaning, future consequences already belong to the thing" (1929, 181-2). Potentials, then, mark the self, form the self, belong to the self. In large

measure, potentials *are* the self.

Let us stop for a moment to appreciate the rather bold nature of this assertion. If I am correct in this, then Dewey is giving us an extraordinary epistemological justification for our model of the self as unique potential. Unfortunately, I have not been able to find an explicit definition of the "self" in his work.[7] Mostly, he describes what it is not. The self is not coexistent with the body: people whose legs are amputated do not automatically lose part of their self; however, they do emphatically lose part of their potentials, and, I would argue, it is this loss of potential which makes for such confusion of self-identity among those who are severely injured by trauma or illness. The self is not equivalent to a person's past, although as part of the person's potential, the past certainly affects the self. The self is not equivalent to consciousness, for consciousness possesses no stability: it is fleeting, "focal and transitive," it is "process, a series of heres and nows," it is "intermittent" (1929, 303). The self might be thought of as coexistent with "mind"; however, Dewey's definition of mind as activity (1934a, 263) seems to preclude this. The self, as an object of experience, may be nothing more than an ever-changing, yet continuous, unique set of potentials associated with an individual; at least, it seems to me,

---

[7]The closest I have found is this passage in "The Unity of the Human Being" (1937):

> We can recognize and identify a man as a single object, a numerical unit, by observation which marks out boundaries, as we note that the bounded object moves as a whole....That is the way in which we recognize a rock, tree, or house as a single object, as a unity and whole. But that which makes a rock a single whole is the interaction of swarms of molecules, atoms and elevtrons; its unity is an affair of the way element work together. The boundaries by which we mark off a human being as a unit are very different from the energeis and organization of energies that make *him a unified human being.* We can observe the boundaries at a single moment. We can grasp the unity only, so to speak, longitudinally--only as something that goes on in a stretch of time. It is not found in any number of cross-sectional views (325-6).

it is these potentials which are the self *operationally*, and it is in our understanding of our own potentials, or capacities, or possible directions, that we place our sense of identity and in which we conceive of our past, present, and future.

If we can accept this statement that potentials are the self, we will be well on our way to developing our concept of self as "unique potential." What remains is to further clarify the "uniqueness" of these potentials. By the use of the word "unique," I mean to express more than simply the obvious statement that each person is different from every other person (the meaning expressed in the first dictionary meaning: "Being the only one of its kind." Rather, I mean in addition the second definition: "Being without an equal or equivalent" (*American Heritage Electronic Dictionary*, 1989). In other words, "unique" implies *incomparable, unrivaled*; without peer. Thus I wish to emphasize that to see each self as a set of unique potentials is to hold that person of ultimate value: irreplaceable. This has certain moral and educational implications; for more on this, see below.

We have already seen that the potentials of the self are bounded by "native capacities, which possess an element of uniqueness" (ibid, 282). Dewey identifies these capacities with unique, individual "temperament and constitution," such as the "peculiar sensitiveness to certain aspects of nature" (ibid, 265) which makes for a gifted artist. But these *a priori* differences are not the only source of the uniqueness of any person's set of potentials. Each person's set of potentials is the direct result of each person's unique set of experiences; furthermore, each individual experience within a person's unique set of experiences is also unique. Experiences are unique "in the details of their

subject matter" (ibid, 43); they are unique because every event possesses its own set of "irreducible, infinitely plural, undefinable, and indescribable qualities" (1929, 85). Being "infinitely plural," qualities are also unique: "nature is an affair of affairs, wherein each one, no matter how linked up it may be with others, has its *own* quality" (ibid, 97). "[Q]ualities. . .depend upon an extraordinary variety and complexity of conditioning events; hence they are evanescent. They are never exactly reduplicated, because the exact combination of events of which they are termini does not precisely recur" (ibid, 115). Since qualities, as the stuff of experience, are "never exactly reduplicated," clearly each experience is also unique. If each individual's set of experiences is unique, then so is each individual self.

> Whenever something is undergone in consequence of a doing, the self is modified. The modification extends beyond acquisition of greater facility and skill. Attitudes and interests are built up which embody in themselves some deposit of the meaning of things done and undergone. These funded and retained meanings become a part of the self. They constitute the capital with which the self notes, cares for, attends, and purposes (1934a, 264).

Since each person's set of experiences ("things done and undergone") is unique, then each person's "attitudes and interests," which embody the meaning of these unique experiences, is also unique. These "funded and retained meanings" which constitute attitudes and interests, become part of the unique self (as "mind"), and operate as "capital" which serves to motivate and make effective the future operations of the self. Each unique self is like "[t]he painter [who does] not approach the scene with an empty mind, but with a background of experiences long ago funded into capacities and likes, or with a commotion due to more recent experiences. He comes with a mind waiting,

patient, willing to be impressed and yet not without bias and tendency in vision. Hence lines and color crystallize in this harmony rather than in that" (1934a, 87). Thus unique prior experiences lead to unique "funded meanings, which lead to unique attitudes and interests, which result in unique biases and tendencies. Thus we say that the "potential" which is the self is truly unique.

Let me now summarize my discussion of unique potential as it has been laid out so far:

- First, I have argued that Dewey locates the very foundations of meaning in the imputation of potentiality to objects or events. We understand objects and acquire the capacity to use them as means only when we become aware of their possible directions or tendencies. Through the application of intelligence to our experience, we come to have power over events and situations, and this power is a direct result of becoming aware of potentialities.
- Second, I have suggested that the self itself can be treated as an example of an "event-with-meaning," or object. This has a dual aspect, in that we have experience of two different kinds of selves: our own self, which is a unique object of our experience, and others' selves, which may be grouped together as a class of objects. Thus our concept of "self" is built up from experiences in both the "subjective" and the "objective" standpoint.
- Third, like any other "event-with-meaning," the essence of the concept of self, its "form and nature," lies in its potentialities. The concept of the self is operationalized to the extent that we impute potentialities to it. Thus a sense of one's "potential" is the very core of a sense of one's self.

- Fourth, because native capacities and constitutions, individual experiences, as well as each individual's set of experiences, are all unique (despite the generic qualities therein), each person's self, or set of potentials, is also unique.
- Fifth, and finally, it is only by being aware of the specific, uniquely individual facts and of the ongoing dialectical interaction between one's self and one's experience, which Dewey speaks of as what we have "done and undergone," that we can apply our unique potentials towards the development of our unique ends-in-view. Unique potential, constitutes bounds on our destinies as much as it contains possibilities. But these bounds are as essential to our liberation as are our freedoms.

Reprise: Does "Unique Potential" Meet the Criteria?

You will recall that in the introduction I laid out four criteria which a model of the self should meet if it is to effectively support a program in moral or character education. How does the concept of unique potential fare against these tests?[8]

The first criterion was whether the model provided for some limits on what the self is or could be. Clearly, the unique potential model, by being based firmly on the limiting factors of native constitution, objective external conditions, and the actual experiences which make up a person's past, provides

---

[8]Because I myself made up these criteria, they do not really form an objective test of the model of unique potential which has been developed here. I would welcome comments about other tests which ought to be applied to the model, especially tests which might seem to put limits on the model's effectiveness.

for these limits and, in fact, incorporates them as means for more effective action and planning. On the other hand, conceiving of the self as a set of unique potentials does not entirely bound the self in terms of its *future*; but this is as it should be, for the future is indeterminate.

The second criterion was whether the model provides for individual differences in selves. The unique potential model, by allowing for the uniqueness of constitution, experience, and purposes, handles this criterion quite well. The question arises, however: how does the model account for the similarities among selves? I suggest that the question of which portion of an individual's potentials is intrinsic to human nature and which portion is unique to him or her is a worthy topic of the sorts of educative experience which ought to be provided in school.

The third criterion was whether the model provides for a process of development of the self. Through its focus on the increasing awareness in the individual of his own potentials, which are revealed through the continual experience of encountering resistance to impulsion, the unique potential model incorporates a dialectical relationship between self and environment in which the self matures, gains efficacy and agency, and individuates. Thus the model would easily meet this criterion.

The fourth criterion was whether the model adequately synthesizes its notion of individual personality with its understanding of social roles. Here I would go back to Dewey, who urges us to adopt the hyphenated phrase "individual-social" to emphasize the dual nature of the human self. The self--and its potentialities--exist only in interaction with the environment, the key feature of which is other selves and the culture in which they exist. This

transactional view of the notion of unique potential does not, unfortunately, say all that needs to be said about the relationship of one's potential to one's social role; however, all I can do for now is admit this as a topic with much left to be worked out.

Moral and Educational Implications

In my discussion so far of how the eudaimonic conception of "daimon", or unique potential, can be compared with Dewey's implied model of the self, I have failed to make one crucial connection. The concept of *daimon*, as expressed by Norton, includes more than simply "unique potential." Norton's theory describes the daimon in terms of "unique potential *excellences*." Thus Norton's theory is explicitly normative and prescriptive as well as descriptive, whereas thus far I have concentrated mainly on the descriptive aspects of Dewey's thought on the self. Is there anything in Dewey's later work which could provide the prescriptive, ethical content to a model of the self as unique potential? The question is almost answered in the asking. Of course Dewey gives us some prescriptive content for our model of the self, by identifying the most complete form of experience as aesthetic experience (see Alexander 1987). There isn't space here to explore the implications of this identification fully. However, a few words are in order.

First, it is clear that only experience which is infused with a sense of movement toward consummation is complete experience. This sense of movement is only possible with an awareness of operative tendencies and therefore with purposes. Thus it would seem that a life experience will be more complete, and therefore more fulfilling, to the extent that the one living is aware of, and conscious of the implications of, his or her own fundamental

purposes. Thus merely becoming aware of one's potentials and living so as to fulfill them in experience is enough to enter into the realm of value.

Second, Dewey writes that a work of art is expressive only to the extent that it contains the sincere emotions and reactions of the artist. "The interest of the artist is the only limitation placed upon use of material, and this limitation is not restrictive. It but states a trait inherent in the work of the artist, the necessity of sincerity; the necessity that he shall not fake and compromise" (1934a, 189). This crucial need for sincerity can be expanded to the larger realm of living a life. The person who does not live in honest pursuit of his interests, through either enslavement to alienating work or conformity to the confining expectations of others, shall not live his best possible life. As Norton writes, "[t]he source of truth and reality in the world is the reality individuals give to their lives by each living the truth that is his own. Living one's own truth constitutes integrity, the consummate virtue" (Norton 1976, 8).

Third, it is through awareness of possibilities, revealed especially in art, that life is enriched. "[A]rt performs liberation and release by manifesting what actual existence actually becomes when its possibilities are fully expressed" (1934a, 280). It is through "imagination vision" that "the possibilities that are interwoven within the texture of the actual" (ibid, 345) are revealed. Thus "poetry," like other arts, "is a criticism of life":

> not directly, but by disclosure, through imaginative vision addressed to imaginative experience (not to set judgment) of possibilities that contrast with actual conditions. A sense of possibilities that are unrealized and that might be realized are when they are put in contrast with actual conditions, the most penetrating 'criticism' of the latter that can be made. It is a sense of possibilities opening before us that we become aware of constrictions that hem us in and of burdens that oppress" (1934a, 346).

For people to overcome these burdens, which are often self-imposed, they need to visualize imaginatively their own potential excellences (see below).

Fourth, it is these ideals of personal excellence, which are the result of this imaginative vision, which in the final analysis are the only telos worth aiming for. Ideals for self, which of course must be firmly rooted in the same objective conditions which should infuse a person's sense of their unique potential, constitute the directional force by which we can become in some measure "better" persons. As Dewey writes in *A Common Faith*, "Imagination of ideal ends pertinent to actual conditions is the fruition of a disciplined mind" (1934b, 52). The set of ideal ends pertinent to the actual conditions of each person's life can be thought of either as a subset of our unique potentials -- those potentials which, though imaginative vision, are selected as worth actualizing -- or as a separate set of hopes and dreams toward which a person strives to develop his or her potential. In either case, ideals are clearly the crucial connection between one's actuality and one's potentiality, and, I would suggest, form a path of living which would give normative content to a well-lived life.

One is brought at this point to reflect on Carl Jung's concept of individuation, in which the self represents an ideal for the actual person. As Violet de Laszlo has written concerning Jung's theory:

> The *self* by definition comprises the full scope of a personality from its most individual traits to its most generic attitudes and experiences, actual as well as potential. Hence, it transcends the existing personality. The archetype of wholeness or of the self can therefore be regarded as the dominant [sic] of psychic growth. The inherent plan of an individual integrative psychic process can thus be likened to the biological plan inherent in the seed of any living organism. This process can be experienced existentially in the personal life history, and symbolically

> whenever the image of wholeness or of the self is present. Indeed the individuation process can be said to lie at the core of all spiritual experience, since it is coequal with a creative transformation of the inner person, and hence reflects the archetypal experience of an inner rebirth. In this context the impact of the symbol becomes the experience of 'meaning' itself, and the archetypal image becomes an ultimate psychic truth and reality (Laszlo 1959, xxii-xxiii).

The identification by Jung of the "self" with both actuality and potentiality, the image of "wholeness" which is contained in the archetype of self, and the connection between the ideal of self and the actual self, which is the process of individuation, are exceedingly reminiscent of what has been developed in this paper out of Dewey's thought.[9]

Fifth, and finally, is the implication underlying Dewey's admiration of the man or woman whose soul is such to give him or her "in marked degree qualities of sensitive, rich and coordinated participation in all the situations of life" (1929, 294). Only the person who has realized that he or she has not just a few potentials, but rather a broad spectrum of potentials for involvement in relationships, community, science, the arts, play, and athletics will have developed this "coordinated participation in all the situations of life." Each person has potentials in all these areas: perhaps not the potential for being at the top of the pack, for this can only belong to a few, but the potential for fulfilling activity and involvement. When our educational institutions act to limit involvement in specific areas of the curriculum, such as interscholastic sports or honors academics, only to those who exhibit extraordinary talent,

---

[9]At some point, I would like to explore more fully the connections between Dewey's empirically-based model of the self and Jung's. An important source for this would be Nagy 1991..

they serve to stifle the natural development of the whole student and hence serve to limit those very potentials which for so long the schools have claimed to be developing.

At this point, I realize, there are still some areas of confusion in the concept of unique potential which I have developed. An example is the relationship between the unique potential and the ideal self, which I raised briefly earlier. Another is the extent to which the unique potential is operative in living one's life. How does personal choice relate to the unique potential, for example? A third is to what extent would Dewey agree with this particular re-formulation of his ideas.[10] While these and many more questions about the

---

[10]Evidence that Dewey would accept this reformulation is found in his 1940 essay "Time and Individuality." In discussing the notion of individual development, he writes:

I shall assume that genuine transformations occurr, and consider its implications. First and negatively, the idea (which is often identified with the essential meaning of evolution) is excluded that development is a process of unfolding what was previously implicit or latent. Positively it is implied that potentiality is a category of existence, for development cannot occur unless an individual has powers or capacities that are not actualized at a given time. But it also means that these powers are not actualized from within, but are called out through interaction with other things. While it is necessary to revive the category of potentiality as a characteristic of individuality, it has to be revived in a different form from that of its classic Aristotelian formulation. According to that view, potentialities are connected with a *fixed* end which the individual endeavors by its own nature or essence to actualize, although its success in actualization depended upon the cooperation of external things and hence might be twarted...

When the idea that development is due to some indwelling end which tends to control

concept remain unanswered, I believe that I have sufficiently demonstrated that the concept is not devoid of meaning and implications, and that these unanswered questions may be worth pursuing in the future.

Finally, let's ponder for a moment whether the concept of "unique potential" would pass Dewey's own test of the value of a philosophy or concept:

> Does it end in conclusions which, when they are referred back to ordinary life-experiences and their predicaments, render them more significant, more luminous to us, and make our dealings with them more fruitful? Or does it terminate in rendering the things of ordinary experience more opaque than they were before, and in depriving them of having in 'reality' even the significance they had previously seemed to have? Does it yield the enrichment and increase of power of ordinary things which the results of physical science afford when applied in every-day affairs? Or does it become a mystery that these ordinary things should be what they are; and are philosophic concepts left to dwell in separation in some technical realm of their own? (1929, 7)

It is my contention that the concept of unique potential meets these tests extremely well, although I can give no concrete evidence to back up this assertion. The concept seems, from my conversations with peers, colleagues, parents, and teachers, to appeal to most people's common sense view of themselves. I also know, from my three years of experience working with somewhat alienated and wayward teenagers at the Hyde School, that the

---

the series of changes passed through is abandoned, potentialities must be thought of in terms of consequences of intereactions with other things. Hence potentialities cannot be *known* till *after* the interactions have occurred. There are at a given time unactualized potentialities in an individual because in as far as there are in existence other things with which it has not yet interacted (109).

concept does provide a framework for coming to grips with one's self: the actual self, the ideal self, and the relationship between them through the potential self. I would suggest that it is the lack of a sense of their own potentials which is at the root of many of these adolescents' drug, alcohol, and behavioral problems.

If we can accept that what we mean by the "self" is the specific bundle of potentialities which make up an individual (her "potential" for short), we can conceptualize growth as the continual integration and individuation of the person's potential. While many specific potentials are widely disbursed in the human population, the specific pattern of potentials within any one person is decidedly unique. As the individual matures through childhood and adolescence, the set of potentials embodied in that individual begins to differentiate itself. Indeed, as the individual struggles to form her own sense of herself--to create an identity distinct from that imposed upon her by parents, peers, and institutions--she begins to focus on the question of just what makes her *her*, as opposed to someone else. This adolescent struggle has been hypostatized as the "identity crisis," and--whether conceived as a crisis or merely a phase of growth--it forms the central problem of human development and, I believe, it represents the most important failure--and the highest challenge--of institutionalized education.

Those adolescents whose identity formation proceeds more "normally" do not seem to need any explicit instruction in how to conceive of themselves; but this is not evidence that the construction of an operative model of the self is not part of normal human development. Like the self itself, "[o]nly in pathological cases, in delusions and insanities and social eccentricities, do we

readily become aware" (1929, 246-7) of the need for such an explicit model. It is in the failures of development, as Freud and Jung and the rest of the psychological tradition have been intimately aware, that we can tease out most clearly the elements of a normal pattern of growth. And, for many of these modern teenage "failures," it is the development of discipline and character within a social environment which is supportive of uniqueness and of the potentials of the individual--whether at Hyde School, or in such programs as Outward Bound, the military academies, "Scared Straight," or Twelve Step programs such as AA--that problems are overcome and self-development put back on track.[11]

As we guide youngsters to create a sense of their own potential, we must be careful to avoid certain conceptual pitfalls. Israel Scheffler's *Of Human Potential* (1985) cites a number of "myths" regarding potentials which need to be dispelled (I would prefer to call them "misconceptions"). These misconceptions are that potentials are *fixed*, *mutually harmonious*, and *uniformly valuable*. This first of these is exemplified in the notion of daimon or unique potential as transcendent, innate, or predetermined. In Dewey's

---

[11]This raises an interesting empirical question: To what extent are the "metaphors" of the self actually operative in these rehabilitation programs: do the metaphors act only as labels for psychic events which would occur in any case, or do the metaphors provide a useful rubric within which these young people can consolidate the experiences they have gained through mandated activities, or do the metaphors in fact drive the process of growth by immediately filling a "gap" in the person's learning about the world? I would like to work further on this question.

transactional, pragmatic conception of experience, where all "truths" are potentially revisable in light of new conditions or ends-in-view, there can be no fixed notion of one's own potential. The set of possible consequences of any self will vary with the experiences and the circumstances of that self. Thus we must avoid seeing the educational aim as developing a "final" sense of the students' potential and build into our programs the expectation of continual change.

The second of Scheffler's misconceptions is that all potentials are mutually harmonious. It is certainly true that not all of the possible consequences of any object or event are actualizable. Choices must be made, by teachers in terms of the selection of curriculum and also by the students themselves. The transition from adolescence to adulthood can only take place if individuals are willing to make choices which limit their future choices. If we follow Dewey's advice, we will also teach youngsters how to make choices among desirable alternatives.

The third of Scheffler's misconceptions is that all potentials are mutually valuable. It seems obvious that this is not so. Simply because an outcome is possible does not make it desirable. The best way to deal with some elements of any person's set of potentials will be to take steps to *avoid* actualization. Again, the need to choose is not removed by successful comprehension of possibilities.

Conclusion

In his discussion of the soul, Dewey reveals that he, like Sichel, hopes for some coherent view of the self which would not be "reduced" out of existence by a world which "seems mad in pre-occupation with what is specific,

particular, disconnected in medicine, politics, science, industry, education" (1929, 295). Dewey clearly believes that some overarching concept giving "connectedness and unity" to the organic person is essential to overcome continued reliance on traditional mythology or on "whatever specific is the fashionable cure of the period" (ibid, 295-6). Dewey's de-emphasis of the concept of "character" in his later ethical writings may be an indication that he felt that it had become merely another "fashionable cure" for the prevailing reductionism of theories of self. Certainly "character" can be a useful concept in education, and it continues to get some attention (e.g., Lickona 1991; Kilpatrick 1992), but the concept has never recovered from being subjected to the scrutiny of emerging social science in the late 1920s and 1930s, under which "character," like the concept of "soul" itself, remained slippery and elusive. Since the time of the publication of the results of Character Education Inquiry (Hartshorne, May, et al., 1928-1930), which essentially destroyed prevailing common-sense notions about character, educators have been unable to replace the "character" concept with anything as effective for motivating and generating ideas about the moral self. I wonder whether science will ever be able to re-synthesize the many fractionable aspects of the self into a unifying concept. A paradox is apparent when we realize the implications of Dewey's assertion about the permeating quality of a work of art, that "it cannot be described nor even specifically pointed at - since whatever is specified in a work of art is one of its differentiations" (1934a, 192). The permeating quality or unity of an organism, like a work of art, is experienced as a "feeling" or an "intuition"; it is part of primary experience. The quality cannot therefore even be named without some differentiation being made through reflection, yet

differentiation is the precise antithesis of the felt continuity. But the process of differentiation into "objects," or events-with-meanings, each with their own set of "potentialities," is the only tool we have for effecting control over the world.

In this paper, I have suggested that the concept of "unique potential" might be an effective metaphor for the underlying unity of the self which could withstand the differentiations of empirical scrutiny. I have attempted to see what the fit might be between the somewhat transcendental eudaimonic concept of "daimon", or unique potential excellence, and John Dewey's empirical, naturalistic epistemology. While Dewey does not speak in terms of "unique potential" as a model for the self, his continued and varied use of the concept of "potential" would seem to provide some initial theoretical justification for this endeavor. I believe I have also shown that the concept is a useful heuristic device for understanding the self in its unified, organic, holistic aspects as well as in its specific, operational, microscopic activities.

Further, if only because writing it has convinced me that "unique potential" is a concept which can and perhaps ought to be supported without reliance on transcendental or metaphysical assertions, then this paper has served a useful purpose. I trust that the reader will also find something of value in the concept and will be led to consider further the implications of the concept of unique potential for philosophies of ethics and of education.

References

Aristotle. 1962. *Nicomachean ethics.* Martin Ostwald, trans. New York: MacMillan.

Bowers, C. A. 1985. Culture against itself: nihilism as an element in recent educational thought. *American Journal of Education* 93(4): 465-490.

Bradley, Edward. 1989. The Hyde solution. *60 Minutes* (T.V. Show), October 29.

Bradley, F. H. 1951. *Ethical studies.* New York: The Liberal Arts Press.

Dewey, John 1929. *Experience and nature.* New York: Dover Publications.

Dewey, John. 1934a. *Art as experience.* New York: Perigee.

Dewey, John. 1934b. *A common faith.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Dewey, John. 1940. Time and individuality. In *The Later Works*, Vol. 14, edited by Jo Ann Boydston, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

Geertz, Clifford. 1983. Local knowledge: Fact and law in comparative perspective. In *Local knowledge: Further essays in interpretive anthropology.* New York: Basic Books.

Glenn, Charles B. 1932. The yearbook as a workbook. *NEA proceedings* 70: 557-560.

Grant, Gerald. 1988. *The world we created at Hamilton High.* Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press.

Hollis, Martin. 1977. The self in action. In *John Dewey reconsidered*, edited by R. S. Peters. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Jackson, Philip W. 1987. Facing our ignorance. *Teachers College Record* 88(3):384-389.

Kilpatrick, William. 1992. *Why Johnny can't tell right from wrong: moral illiteracy and the case for character education.* New York: Simon and Schuster.

Kohlberg, Lawrence. 1976. The cognitive-developmental approach to moral education. In *Moral education: It comes with the territory*, David Purpel and Kevin Ryan, eds., 176-195. Berkeley: Phi Delta Kappa.

Kuic, Vukan. 1974. The contribution of Yves R. Simon to political science. *The Political Science Review* 4(1): 55-104.

Laszlo, Violet S. de. 1959. Introduction. In *The basic writings of C. G. Jung.* New York: Modern Library.

Lawson, George B. 1915. Character - The secondary school; its opportunity. *Education* 35(10): 628-632.

Leibniz. 1972. *A collection of critical essays.* Garden City: Doubleday Anchor Books.

Lickona, Thomas. 1991. *Educating for character: How our schools can teach respect and responsibility.* New York: Bantam Books.

Maller, J. B. 1934. General and specific factors in character. *The Journal Of Social Psychology* 5:97-102.

Maslow, Abraham H. 1962. *Toward a psychology of being.* Princeton: D. Van Nostrand.

Nagy, Marilyn. 1991. *Philosophical issues in the psychology of C. G. Jung.* Albany: SUNY Press.

Noddings, Nel. 1988. An ethic of caring and its implications for instructional arrangements. *American Journal Of Education* 96(2): 215-230.

Neumann, Henry. 1930. Some doubts about character measuring. *Religious Education* 25(7): 620-626.

Norton, David L. and Mary K. Norton. 1972. From law to love: social order as self-realization. *The Journal Of Value Inquiry* 6(2): 91-101.

Norton, David L. 1976. *Personal destinies: a philosophy of ethical individualism.* Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press.

Norton, David L. 1991. *Democracy and moral development: A politics of virtue.* Berkeley: Univ. of California Press.

Peck, M. Scott. 1978. *The road less traveled: A new psychology of traditional values and spiritual growth.* New York: Simon & Schuster.

Pritchard, Ivor. 1988. Character education: research prospects and problems. *American Journal of Education* 96(4): 469-495.

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. 1979. *Emile: Or, on education*, translated by Allan Bloom. New York: Basic Books.

Sichel, Betty A.1988. *Moral education: Character, community, and ideals.* Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press.

Sisson, Edward O.1927. What can the school do more for character? *Religious Education* 22(9): 926-931.

Scheffler, Israel. 1985. *Of human potential.* Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Waitley, Denis E. 1978. *The psychology of winning.* (Cassette series). Chicago: Nightingale-Conant Corporation.